NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0078 JANUARY 30, 1976
WILLIAM WADE/LONDON

DETENTE AND THE IRON LADY

ANNCR:

THE SOVIET ATTACK ON BRITAIN'S OPPOSITION LEADER, MISSUS MARGARET THATCHER, HAS STIRRED A NEW DEBATE ON DETENTE, MOSCOW'S MOTIVES AND THE BALANCE OF POWER. FROM LONDON VOA CORRESPONDENT WILLIAM WADE DISCUSSES THE BACKGROUND:

VOICE:

THE SOVIET PRESS HAS LABELED MISSUS THATCHER THE IRON LADY AND A WARRING AMAZON AND, RISING TO THE BAIT, THE CHINESE NEWS AGENCY HAS LIKENED HER TO WINSTON CHURCHILL. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT, THE AFFAIR HAS LED MANY BRITONS TO TAKE A HARDER LOOK AT RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION, THE STATE OF DETENTE AND THE MILITARY BALANCE.

IT ALL BEGAN ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO WHEN MISSUS THATCHER TOLD A CONSERVATIVE PARTY RALLY THE SOVIET UNION IS ACQUIRING ENOUGH ARMS TO MAKE IT "THE MOST POWERFUL IMPERIAL NATION THE WORLD HAS SEEN." BEFORE THE WEEK WAS OUT THE SOVIET EMBASSY TOOK THE UNUSUAL STEP OF PROTESTING AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND SENDING A LETTER TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY TO COMPLAIN OF MISSUS THATCHER'S "EXTREME UNFRIENDLINESS" AND "OPEN HOSTILITY."

PROFESSOR JOHN ERICKSON, AN EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY SPECIALIST ON SOVIET AFFAIRS, THINKS MISSUS THATCHER'S SPEECH GAVE MOSCOW AN OPPORTUNITY IT WAS LOOKING FOR. HE SAYS SOVIET LEADERS HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED WITH THE APPARENT

WESTERN INDIFFERENCE AND APATHY TO LAST YEAR'S HELSINKI DECLARATION. WHEN MISSUS THATCHER QUESTIONED THE REALITY OF DETENTE, PROFESSOR ERICKSON SAYS, MOSCOW LEAPED TO ITS DEFENSE. BRITAIN'S LIBERAL NEWSPAPER, THE GUARDIAN, SEES LITTLE NEW IN MISSUS THATCHER'S SPEECH, IN VIEW OF WHAT SHE AND OTHER CONSERVATIVES HAVE BEEN SAYING FOR YEARS. ANGLO-SOVIET RELATIONS, THE GUARDIAN SAYS, ARE NOW BETTER THAN THE CHILL THAT FOLLOWED THE OUSTER OF ONE HUNDRED AND FIVE SOVIET DIPLOMATS FOR ESPIONAGE IN 1971 BY THE THEN-CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. BUT THE NEWSPAPER ADDS, SCARCELY A WEEK GOES BY WITHOUT A SHARP SOVIET NEWSPAPER OR RADIO ATTACK ON THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, WHATEVER ITS POLITICAL COMPLEXION. THE CRITICISM RANGES OVER BRITISH DEFENSE SPENDING, ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES AND ITS RULE IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

THE INFLUENTIAL WEEKLY, THE ECONOMIST, SAYS THAT BEHIND THE SOMEWHAT COMIC SOUND AND FURY LIES THE UNCHANGED -- AND UNAPPETIZING -- STATE OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS. THE ECONOMIST SAYS THESE INCLUDE LIMITED RESULTS IN NUCLEAR ARMS TALKS AND THE CURRENT SOVIET AND CUBAN INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA. SOVIET LEADERS, THE WEEKLY ADDS, HAVE SO FAR DONE LITTLE TO FULFILL THE PROMISES THEY MADE AT HELSINKI. INSTEAD THE SOVIET PRESS HAS NOW SEIZED ON MISSUS THATCHER AS A DIVERSIONARY THEME IN A WAY -- THE ECONOMIST SAYS -- THAT OFFERS CLUMSY PROOF FOR THE CHINESE JIBES ABOUT THE SOVIET POLICY OF SHAM DETENTE.

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